

EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT
ROUTING SLIP

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14	D/OLL				
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18	C/IPD/OIS				
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Remarks

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Date



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

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February 27, 1985

MEMORANDUM TO DISTRIBUTION LIST A

FROM: S/LPD - Otto J. Reich *OR*

SUBJECT: Press Censorship in Nicaragua

Since March 1982, the Sandinista-dominated Government of Nicaragua has imposed strict prior censorship over all of Nicaragua's independent media. The principal target of this censorship has been the newspaper La Prensa, virtually the only source of non-Sandinista information for most Nicaraguans.

La Prensa was a relentless critic of the Somoza regime; the assassination of its editor, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Cardenal, in January 1978 sparked the revolution that put the Sandinistas in power. Since the revolution, La Prensa's continuing endorsement of democratic values has led to open confrontation with the Sandinistas. The Sandinistas, recognizing that it would be politically costly to close La Prensa, have opted instead to muzzle it through heavy censorship.

The extent of Sandinista control over La Prensa, and thereby over information inside Nicaragua in general, is not well known outside the country. About ninety articles were censored by the Sandinistas from the issues of December 28, 1984, to January 4, 1985. Censored items included reports on popular resistance to the draft, problems of the economy, external relations, human rights abuses, and guerrilla activity, as well as a number of opinion pieces written by members of the civic opposition. On January 2, censorship was so heavy that La Prensa could not be published at all.

This smothering level of censorship is not uncommon; the following week, for example, the Sandinistas prohibited seventy-five articles, again preventing La Prensa from publishing on January 8, and leading its editors to cancel publication on January 9 in protest.

Enclosed is a review of La Prensa articles censored by the Sandinistas during a single week. We have sent this item to 138 journalists around the country and thought you might also be interested in seeing it.

Enclosure:

As stated.



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CENSORSHIP OF LA PRENSA:
A REVIEW OF ONE WEEK OF PROHIBITED ARTICLES

Major topics censored from La Prensa during the week of December 28, 1984 - January 4, 1985, included the following:

I. MILITARY CONSCRIPTION/DRAFT RESISTANCE (12 reports)

A. Two major stories and five photographs described the December 27 round-up by turbas (Sandinista mobs) and soldiers of draft-age youths hiding in the town of Nagarote.

B. Four major articles dealt with the Costa Rican Embassy in Managua providing asylum to army deserter Jose Manuel Urbina, his subsequent shooting and detention by the Sandinistas, and the Embassy's request for Urbina's return, including warnings that the Costa Rican Government was prepared to take the case to the Organization of American States, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission, and the members of the Contadora Group.

C. Individual articles included:

a story from Ocotal that fifteen drafted youths had escaped/deserted from a training camp, assisted in part by anti-Sandinistas;

a report that the Sandinista Defense Committees thwarted another protest (the third) planned by twelve mothers in Esteli whose sons were drafted;

public appeals by parents to the government: (a) not to draft again an inductee who had already served one year, had been injured, and is needed to support his family; and, (b) to release from service another inductee who is seriously ill;

two reports of mysterious disappearances of nineteen-year-old boys.

II. ECONOMY (19 reports)

A. Five articles reported and criticized the Central Bank's decision to require payment of international air fares in dollars. In the longest article, buhoneros (peddlers who import goods to Nicaragua) claimed that a US \$1,500 currency limitation for the purchase of merchandise mandated frequent travel and that the extra cost would be added to the final price of the goods. The Buhoneros Union was to meet January 24 to discuss the crisis caused by the dollar travel crisis. Another article declared that the new decree itself violated existing laws which (a) require all transactions within the

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country to be negotiated in national currency and (b) limit currency leaving the country to \$500.00. It added that the cost of tickets alone often exceeds this amount. A short article said that although a stated goal of the decree was to reduce demand, an effect might be to close transport companies. The cotton growers union issued an open letter protesting the change. A short article carried complaints from taxi drivers at the airport about reduced travel.

B. Water shortages: A long article and large photograph described how the frequent suspension of water service had interfered with the industry of extracting starch from yucca. Vendors have appeared selling water--one article stated the price was 30-35 cordobas (28 cordobas = 1 U.S. dollar at the parallel market rate) per barrel. A large photograph showed a vendor with a horse-drawn water barrel.

C. Gasoline shortages: A major article complained about long lines and confusion at gasoline stations. A short article announced Petronic's (the state-owned petroleum organization) proposed 75 percent increase in the price of gasoline.

D. Lengthy testimonials from various sectors demonstrated that economic life was worsening. Major articles included: a 73-year-old master shoemaker walking streets looking for work; tailors who could not find materials; drivers from the national electric company (INE) requesting an increase in their 2,800 cordoba monthly salary; some teachers who were not being paid; housewives confronting spiraling cost of goods in the marketplace. A photograph showed a woman looking through garbage.

E. A short article noted that large-denomination bills were not available in the banks.

F. A short article charged the government commercial agency (DISPER) with failing in its responsibility to control price and supply of goods.

III. EXTERNAL RELATIONS (10 reports)

A. With Colombia--One article said that six Colombians returning from trips to Nicaragua and Cuba had been detained in Medellin when customs agents discovered two mail bags filled with ammunition and a letter supposedly signed by junta coordinator (and now President) Daniel Ortega. Another article stated that custom agents in Medellin had discovered a photocopied letter and ammunition. The letter outlined plans for a Nicaraguan invasion of San Andres Island (under Colombian jurisdiction but claimed by Nicaragua), which the Nicaraguan government, in a joint effort with Colombian guerrillas, intended to destabilize through a revolution in 1986. The same article stated that 1,400 members of the Colombian guerrilla

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organizations FARC and M-19 are now living in Nicaragua. Yet another article announced that the Nicaraguan government had decided to retire from circulation a 1983 map of Nicaragua that showed San Andres as Nicaraguan territory and that junta member (and now Vice President) Sergio Ramirez had ordered the Nicaraguan Ambassador in Colombia to notify Colombian President Betancur of the decision.

B. With Costa Rica--Four major articles dealt with Urbina asylum case. One article carried news of the Costa Rican note of protest to Nicaraguan Foreign Minister D'Escoto regarding Defense Minister Humberto Ortega's announcement that U.S. was stationing troops in Costa Rica. A shorter article said that 48 Nicaraguans recently had sought political asylum at the frontier with Costa Rica.

C. One article noted that East Germany had donated to the Nicaraguan government a half million Marxist books, which were received by Education Minister Fernando Cardenal in Corinto.

IV. HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES (9 reports)

A. Major stories included: the Tribunal de Apelaciones (Appeals Court) of Managua had received 700 applications of habeas corpus for arbitrary arrest and detention, the majority of which were brought against the Interior Ministry; a psychiatric patient claiming to be Che Guevara had killed another patient; a released prisoner described psychological torture in the prison "La Chacra" in Esteli.

B. Minor stories included: an assault on a Social Democratic Party member in Rivas; an individual threatened with death for not participating in activities of the Sandinista Defense Committees (CDS); relatives looking for person arrested in 1981; a nurse and stretcher bearer arrested because they had refused to allow the military to interrogate a dying child who had been injured by a grenade; a vendor falsely accused of robbery.

C. The Central American Unionist Party (PUCA) requested a general pardon as an effort to obtain national reconciliation.

V. ANTI-SANDINISTA ACTIVITY (8 reports)

A. Two stories reported the arrest by state security (DGSE) of Dr. Salomon Calvo Arrieta, correspondent for Radio Impacto (of San Jose, Costa Rica). Nicaraguan journalists in exile in Costa Rica denounced the arrest.

B. Two stories dealt with MISURA leader Steadman Fagoth. One reported that Fagoth had threatened to execute 26 army prisoners if the Sandinistas attempted to rescue them. Fagoth offered to exchange 23 prisoners.

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C. One report stated that the last Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN) attack of the year in the north killed two civilians and four soldiers; the FDN also purportedly burned a school and attacked a cooperative.

D. One story said that the anti-FSLN groups in the south headed by Eden Pastora accused the Sandinista army of using chemicals against them. In another short article, Pastora announced that the Sandinista military had concentrated troops at the extreme ends of the Rio San Juan for an imminent attack.

E. One story from San Jose said ARDE announced it was forming an international anti-Soviet liberation movement which would include nationalist movements from Angola, Mozambique, and Afghanistan.

VI. MISCELLANEOUS

A. Numerous long editorials/editorial-type articles offered wide-ranging criticisms and predictions for the new year. One reported that Henry Ruiz had criticized poor administration of the government. Among the articles were open letters from the private sector umbrella group COSEP, from Social Christian Party leaders Dr. Julio Ramon Garcia Vilchez and Erick Ramirez, from La Prensa's Jaime Chamorro, and from the Social Democratic Party.

B. Four articles noted random or unexplained shootings or explosions in Ocotal and nearby Madriz on Christmas Eve and a large explosion in Paso Caballos. Random shooting reportedly killed a 23-year-old and injured his brother in Nandaime.

C. Two short articles were on the church. One reported U.S. Archbishop Roach's backing of Nicaraguan bishops. A short article reported on second round of church-state joint commission talks, at which it was declared that each bishop was free to decide whether to attend Ortega's inauguration.

D. One story described a short resolution from a Democratic Conservative Party meeting.

E. One article reported a military truck accident.

F. One article noted that the disappearance of an engineer who was the head of the Cuban-backed sugar refinery project (TIMAL) coincided with the disappearance of a million cordobas.

G. One cartoon showed an army soldier growing old waiting for an "imminent" invasion.

H. Several "Rionsito" brief political satire pieces were critical of Sandinista government.